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**An Interview with Julius Lester**

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• No. 24

# The Talky American

**THE GAME OF NATIONS:** The Amoralty of Power Politics. By Miles Copeland. Simon & Schuster. 318 pp. \$6.95.

## DESMOND STEWART

Mr. Stewart has spent most of the last twenty years in the successor states of the Ottoman Empire: Egypt, Iraq and Lebanon. He is the author of a trilogy, *The Sequence of Roles*, and has just completed a study of the Near East called *The Temple of Janus*, which Doubleday will publish next year.

Mr. Miles Copeland was for some years the junior member of a CIA team attached to the U.S. Embassy in Cairo. As name-dropper and influence peddler, he steered the resilient bump 'em car through the Middle East. But despite this rich experience, and despite his book's title and subtitle, Copeland's anti-memoirs distill no icy theorem of political strategy to set beside Machiavelli's *The Prince*. Nor do they constitute a factual account of happenings in the Levant. Such key events as the Israeli raid on Gaza in February 1955, which had as its consequences Nasser's involvement with the Soviet Union, receive but sliding mention, while a prestigious dinner party at which the author was present straddles the book, appearing twice with an interval of many pages. Still less are we dealing with "faction," a neologism defined by Copeland as "fact presented in fictional terms," since the names, if not the conversations, are for real.

*The Game of Nations* is an indiscreet and undocumented reminiscence of a man employed in, or around, the CIA. It functions as a torpedo, fueled by love-hate, sent zigzagging against the Egyptian President; accidentally it harms the CIA, making it appear not so much lethal as silly and talkative (any future statesman inclined to unburden himself to one of its agents will weigh his words as if they were the kind of rocks once used for stoning).

Some of Copeland's revelations are so irresponsible as to endear him to liberals. His account of the one successful CIA intervention in the Arab world (the overthrow of Iran's Mossadegh and the restoration of the Shah) is a mixture of knockabout and naïveté. Arguing that in early 1949 "we weren't really Machiavellian and that the current idealism was almost as prominent in our covert activity as it was in our overt," Copeland evokes a CIA group—its one "near-genius intellect" significantly disapproving—looking for an area wherein to plot

an idealistic, not necessarily democratic but pro-American coup. Iraq, a fief of Britain, was rejected, not apparently because it was already the most pro-Western state in the region but because "all programmable evidence showed Nuri Pasha's Government to be virtually coup-proof." The area chosen for experimentation was Syria, then ruled by a wobbly parliamentary system.

In March 1949, Husni Za'im, a notorious Kurdish general, was assisted by these American idealists in launching what proved to be the first of an alphabet of Syrian coups. In power, he was a disappointment. "Za'im had been so 'amenable to suggestion' (as we said in our reports) before the coup that it never occurred to us that things would change afterwards." But change things did. Za'im insisted on Copeland's jumping to his feet when he came into the room; the friendly "tu" must yield to "vous"; so after four and a half months, Za'im went.

Syria was a mere rehearsal for Egypt, to the CIA, as to Napoleon, *The Most Important Country*. Initially, the CIA had thought to reorganize Egypt through a palace revolution led by Farouk. This marijuana vision wilted in the gray light of Abdin Palace. Instead, Kermit Roosevelt visited Cairo and established contact with the "Free Officers," in existence for many years but gingered by the fiasco of the first Palestine war. In Gamal Abdel Nasser the CIA recognized, Copeland believes, an ambitious and effective leader who would first establish a power base, the army, loyal to himself, since he would share the fruits of power with it, and then cooperate with such U.S. aims as the settlement of the conflict with Israel. In return for such accommodation, this archetypal leader, unfettered by democratic controls, would be given U.S. support to become a more powerful Arab leader than any in the past.

Copeland assures us—and the assurance must have shored his reputation in Washington as much as familiarity with "Walt" and "Dick" shored it in Cairo—that

Over the years I have probably seen more of Nasser than any other Westerner. Even now, although it is no longer possible to drop in on him informally and stay for lunch, I manage a long talk with him every month or two, and under relaxed circumstances in which he is most likely to be himself. I have gone into these talks sometimes with no other purpose than a friendly social visit, sometimes with

Camp Pendleton...

The Presidio...

Captain Levy...

## Military Justice is to Justice as Military Music is to Music

by ROBERT SHERRILL

"Robert Sherrill's account of the sham of courts-martial and of the harsh, dehumanizing treatment afforded military prisoners should inspire national outrage." — SENATOR GEORGE A. MCGOVERN

"The author has told it like it is. . . I fear that a high percentage of those who read the book will refuse to believe it."

— GEN. DAVID M. SHOUP, former Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps.

"A chilling analysis of what can pass for justice in a military system swollen and made callous by the Vietnam war."

— MIKE WALLACE, CBS News

"A remarkable book. In citing chapter and verse of military stupidity, venality and brutishness, Sherrill really goes beyond the stockade: he's telling us about the street."

— STUDS TERKEL



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a mission to accomplish for one or another of my companies, sometimes briefed to the teeth by a CIA doctor, psychiatrist or ordinary intelligence officer to enable me to detect any signs of failing health or powers.

Such claims—important though they are for Copeland's book—are as slippery as eels. On the basis of his own knowledge, this reviewer would suggest that a variety of respectable Westerners know Nasser a good deal better than Copeland. Eugene Black, for instance, former president of the World Bank; or Sir Harold Beeley, former British Ambassador to Cairo; Tom Little, of Reuters; Eric Rouleau, born in Cairo of Jewish parents, and a frequent visitor to Egypt after his emigration to Paris and *Le Monde*.

Even so, the early Nasser had good reasons for cultivating the CIA. Every 20th-century Egyptian interested in politics is seared with the memory of 1882, the year when Orabi Pasha, leader of a nationalist, and by intention democratic, revolution, was defeated by the intervention of a British army on behalf of Khedive Tawfik, Farouk's uncle. Seventy years later, in 1952, the British still occupied the Suez Canal Zone. Though they had little admiration for the debauched King, it was theoretically possible, as Farouk knew, for him to call on their assistance against an army *coup d'état*. The condition for U.S. support against the British intervention—the sparing of Farouk's life—entirely fitted with Nasser's temperament.

A useful place at which to board this book is its subtitle: "The Amoralism of Power Politics." No serious student of human affairs has ever argued that collective groups often behave altruistically. But this does not mean that *The Prince* (or modern derivatives) presents an unchallenged theorem. Another, and surely more important theorem, derives from the Butlerian tradition that what is in one's own true interests may be in the interests of others also (the emphasis being on *true*). And since Copeland concerns himself with the Arab world, it is legitimate at this point to throw in a saying of the Prophet: "Hunger is blasphemy."

To a Southern gentleman, with several companies and a suite reserved at the Cairo Hilton, it is possible to talk of politics in terms of baseball; to the hungry, and their representatives, it is not. What is involved for them is often one national asset—oil in the Middle East; fruit in Guatemala, tungsten somewhere else—and their attempt to benefit from it, perhaps to control it, as a basis for recovery. In the case of Egypt,

Nasser wished to use strategic position as well as natural assets as a lever which means, in fact, being prosperous enough to stand up to bribes.

Against a background of maximum indecency, of a millennial struggle for self-rule, intellectual efforts to "program" a desirable leader with an oligarchic power base and effective "golden lies" (to quote Plato, not Copeland), are smashed by fundamental irruptions from below. Of course, there are Egyptians who would sell their country for a drip-dry suit. ("I once gave Nasser an American-tailored drip-dry suit," Copeland tells us; "he thought it was the most ridiculous-looking garment he had ever seen. 'What kind of tailoring do you like?' I asked. 'British, of course,' he replied.")

Of course, the unpudding minds of Arab intellectuals enjoy the game of amoral talk, as new to them as frontal nudity in films. Of course, Nasser's confidant, the editor of *Al-Ahram*, may have sweetened Nasser's messages to the CIA, and vice versa; private tact is as much an Arab disease as public exaggeration. But no leader could survive in modern Egypt, as Nasser has survived, who was not deeply sensitive and responsible to what his people required. Copeland's intimate knowledge of Nasser seems to have left two discernible and warring attitudes: admiration for his pertinacity and ability to hold on to power; pique at his refusal to be corralled. What he seems to have entirely missed is the plus factor of popular support, which also means popular control.

Nasser may have seemed to his American friends of 1952 as no more than a younger, more puritan and more intelligent Husni Za'im. Indeed, until he nationalized the canal he seemed hardly more to most Arabs and to many Egyptians. But in major developments since 1956 he has shown an extraordinary ability to recover from his mistakes and at the same time to interpret those basic popular yearnings which Copeland, as an outsider, has regarded as factors rather than overwhelming forces. Arab unity, Arab socialism are phrases that can lead to so much debate that the notions behind them seem to disappear. But only *seem*; both correspond to overwhelming collective urges—for unity in resistance to a West that has constantly tried to dominate it; for progress toward the removal of gross inequalities in social status, as well as in clothing and food. No amount of programming could have arranged, or even predicted, the re-election of Nasser by popular stampede after the worst defeat of his career in June 1967.

For, however subject to despots, the Arabs have put "consensus" on a level with the Koran and the Prophet's sayings. Thus no amount of electoral gerrymandering, thought-tank theorizing or assassinations by bullet or pen can halt Middle East insistence on resistance and social change. The lesson of Copeland's book is simple. The United States would be a stronger influence today if the men playing the Game of Nations at Copeland's Games Center ("working hours 5.30 P.M. to midnight") had been pensioned off in some Californian Shangri-La, and the problems of American interests in the Middle East left to the ordinary U.S. diplomats, who, *pace* Copeland, have often been intelligent and usually honest servants of their country. They would not have sponsored the short reign of Husni Za'im; they might have avoided graver errors; above all, they would have left the American image as dexterous if innocent, not simultaneously sinister and ineffective. □

## Cold Frame

THE COLONEL'S PHOTOGRAPH AND OTHER STORIES. By *Eugène Ionesco*. Translated by Jean Stewart and John Russell. Grove Press. 177 pp. \$4.95. Paper \$1.95.

CHILDREN ARE CIVILIANS TOO. By *Heinrich Böll*. Translated by Leila Vennewitz. McGraw-Hill Book Co. 190 pp. \$5.95.

### RICHARD HOWARD

Mr. Howard's most recent books are *Alone with America: Essays on the Art of Poetry in the United States Since 1930* and his third volume of poems for which he won this year's Pulitzer Prize, *Untitled Subjects* (both Atheneum).

There is less than meets the eye in these stories from the fifties by Ionesco, stories from the forties by Böll. However divergent the methods of the German Catholic novelist and the French Romanian playwright, however discrepant these celebrated and prolific Europeans in their characteristic productions, they converge and coincide with a telling significance in these leavings, these *fonds de tiroir*. These stories have been used, or used up, for some other purpose—they are not here for themselves, or for us. We are offered a cluster of minor texts, after the fact, as clean-up time.

Neither Böll nor Ionesco is concerned